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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 002902

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED ON DETENTION OF GEORGIAN TEENAGERS

REF: STATE 121252

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In response to reftel demarche, the MFA told us that Russia was pressing for the release of the four Georgian minors in South Ossetian custody. Russia expects them to be released within the next few days. The GOR supports a South Ossetian proposal to exchange all detainees, noting pressure to keep the Georgian teenagers in custody unless a group of South Ossetian teenagers is simultaneously released. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Beyrle pressed for the minors' release with DFM Grigoriy Karasin on November 26; in addition, we raised the points with MFA 4th CIS Director Andrey Kelin November 25.

¶3. (C) In his meeting with the Ambassador, DFM Karasin lamented that hostage-taking is an age-old tradition in the Caucasus, but said we must all battle against it. He said he had discussed the issue of the four teenagers on November 25 with Morel and that "we're doing what we can to get them released." He noted that there are a total of five groups of detainees being held by either the Georgians or South Ossetians, and that Russia is working on an "everyone-for-everyone" exchange of them. He urged the U.S. to support this concept and encourage the GOG to accept it as well.

¶4. (C) Kelin told us that Russia was pressing South Ossetia to release the teenagers, and expected South Ossetian authorities to release the four minor Georgian detainees within the next few days. Kelin added that Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg was involved in the issue, as was head of the EU observer mission Hans-Joerg Haber.

¶5. (C) Kelin said that prior to the detention of the Georgian minors, both sides were regularly releasing detainees. He also raised the idea of a comprehensive exchange of detainees, saying it was a South Ossetian proposal and would affect 85 South Ossetians and 25 Georgians currently being held (according to South Ossetian statistics).

¶6. (C) Kelin noted that South Ossetia claimed Georgian authorities were holding five South Ossetian minors since August 2008 (after releasing a sixth). The Russian "ambassador" to South Ossetia had just received the mothers of the minors, who had demanded that South Ossetia only release the Georgian minors if their own children were simultaneously released.

Beyrle